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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a conference held by the Family Resource Coalition (FRC) in October 1991, which brought together an interdisciplinary group of academics and family resource practitioners to address questions of quality in family support and, more specifically, in staff development and personnel. The report provides the rationale for convening the conference, examines challenges facing the family support movement, and describes desirable program characteristics. Current training programs and delivery systems are also discussed. The report then recommends: (1) gathering information for the development of a best practices statement; (2) developing these best practices into specific training programs; (3) developing a training cadre to disseminate such programs; (4) continuing work on the integration of various cultural values into training programs; (5) continuing work on the refinement of terminology used in the family support field; and (6) studying further the current family support delivery systems. Two appendixes present an update on best practices projects undertaken by the FRC and a list of conference participants. (MDM)

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Training in Family Support: Towards a Conceptual Framework

A REPORT FROM:

A WINGSPREAD CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 1991

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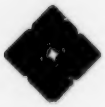

FAMILY RESOURCE COALITION

The Family Resource Coalition's mission is to build support and resources within communities that strengthen and empower families, enhance the capacities of parents, and foster the optimal development of children and youth. This national Coalition provides leadership by developing resources for programs, by affecting public policies, and by increasing the public understanding of and commitment to families.

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The Wingspread Monograph was written by Christine Vogel, Staff Writer for the Family Resource Coalition, based on transcripts of tapes from the conference proceedings.

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Developing a Framework for Staff Training and Development in Family Support

A Report from the Wingspread Conference, October 1991

This monograph presents the results of a Wingspread Conference convened by the Family Resource Coalition in October 1991, with support from the Johnson Foundation, Inc. and the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation.

Wingspread conferences are brief, intensive meetings of a small number of specialists who gather to address a well-defined issue. They usually represent a collaboration between the Johnson Foundation and some other institution which is addressing goals consonant with the Foundation's mission.

The Johnson Foundation accepted the Family Resource Coalition's conference proposal based on its support for projects that contribute to the vitality and well-being of the American family in an increasingly urban, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society.

The conference brought together an interdisciplinary group of academics and family resource practitioners to address questions of quality in family support generally and in staff development and personnel specifically.

The Wingspread Conference, conducted over a period of three days, consisted of plenary sessions, small discussion group sessions, and large group "wrap-ups." Presenters and participants addressed conference issues with varying levels of depth and detail. This monograph, which was prepared with the use of transcripts and tapes (and did not include materials from the small group discussions) reflects those variances.

The conference was held at Wingspread, the final "prairie house" designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Located just north of Racine, Wisconsin, it is an architectural landmark that served as a supportive setting for discussions and elicited creative responses to the issues being addressed by conferees.

Introduction

Amid the myriad of challenges that confront society today, few are as crucial to its future as the support and preservation of its greatest resource—our children and their families. In a society that has become increasingly fragmented, it is often difficult to build an accurate picture of a family in order to effectively meet its particular needs. For one thing, families have changed and the long-accepted picture of a two-parent, sole-wage-earner nuclear family is no longer universally applicable. Secondly, many of our long-honored sources of help—state governments, social services, and schools—are overwhelmed by too many demands and too few funds to help the widely divergent needs of today's varying family units.

What was once seen as a tightly woven social "safety net" is more often described as a cluster of islands that are helpful only if you know—and many do not—how to jump from one to another. Even if you learn how to jump between islands, the islands may be so far apart that they are inaccessible.

In an attempt to create cohesive structures that can effectively address the complex needs of today's families and children, an increasing number of community-based family resource programs and multidisciplinary approaches to family support are being developed all over the nation. The goals of these new programs and approaches are multifold:

- to **prevent** problems before they occur
- to **strengthen** families' capacities to nurture their children and function well for all family members
- to **integrate** fragmented services and make them more accessible to families
- to **create** social networks and foster community involvement and
- to **encourage** and **empower** families so they feel able to solve their own problems.

This approach has the potential to redefine the understanding and practice of human services.

The key to the success of these programs, regardless of their origin or the specific services they provide, is the training and development of staff members, who are expected to establish and maintain positive, nurturing relationships with the families they serve. Elements of the skills required to create such relationships are taught in several disciplines: social work, psychology, child development, health, and community development. Moreover, each field is beginning to expand its services to include family support practices.

Background for Convening the Wingspread Conference

Several fundamental issues served as catalysts for the development of the Wingspread Conference. These issues highlighted the growing need for a conceptual training framework which would focus on establishing productive partnerships with families.

Interdisciplinary Pre-Service Training

The strength of the family support field lies in its purposeful integration of elements of theory and practice from several different arenas. Indeed, there is some agreement that family support practice represents a "multidisciplinary profession" rather than a field per se. In recent years, there have been increasing concerns about the nature and quality of the pre-service preparation currently available. Many family support professionals have reached a consensus that family support training should be available in different college and university departments, rather than isolated in a single discipline, such as social work or education.

The challenge of maintaining and encouraging the multidisciplinary focus while devising appropriate training for professionals entering the field emerged as a critical concern over the course of the conference.

Existing Demonstration Projects and Their Training Programs

Innovative demonstration projects that are underway in several states provided another impetus for the Wingspread Conference. These projects, designed to bring about systems change, had begun to utilize family support principles in the services that states provide to families. A few programs aim at helping families achieve economic self-sufficiency. Others work to prevent out-of-home placements for children in child welfare systems by adopting preventive, capacity-building approaches. Regardless of the services provided, the programs have incorporated staffing patterns and staff preparation that are decidedly different from traditional approaches.

These programs, and the professionals charged with their implementation, have struggled to improvise appropriate training programs for their workers. Often they have faced the challenge of retraining current workers in methods that are contrary to existing practices. Frequently, they have used lessons learned from family support practitioners. As these innovative programs expand to statewide initiatives, the need to develop high quality, cost- effective training programs for staff becomes more urgent.

Survey of Current Training Practices

Staff development has always been a critical element of successful family support programs. Despite the wide range of programs, a common value is respect for individual variation. Family support practitioners work across cultures, across systems, and across the varying languages that different systems use. They also work across academic disciplines. As a result, they have developed unique ways of approaching problems that are reflective of and responsive to the cultures and traditions of the families they serve. The creation of non-hierarchical environments in which parents play a key role has evolved as an aspect of good practice—and part of a general implicit understanding of what constitutes a quality family support program.

Practitioners and academics have had informal conversations about staff development and training since the grass-roots movement emerged over fifteen years ago. Yet there had never been a systematic examination of the kinds of training available to practitioners: who was doing it, how often, and, most importantly, whether the currently available training adequately met the needs of practitioners in the field.

In 1990, with support from the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, the Family Resource Coalition conducted a study of the current training for family resource programs. The small-scale survey of trainers was not intended to be comprehensive, and it raised as many questions as it answered. But it also revealed some specific findings about training:

1 Family support trainers had begun to integrate family support principles into other systems with which they had contact.

2 The trainers surveyed provided both pre-service and in-service training to a range of individuals across all levels and categories of staff.

3 Trainers operated with the viewpoint that training served as an opportunity to model the supportive, empowering interactions to be used with families.

4 Training was delivered in a manner that integrated content and theory, and promoted interaction and participation.

5 Trainers had discovered that in the same way that staff learn by experiences with families, so trainers learn by training.

6 All the trainers surveyed expressed a desire to meet with others in the field to begin to develop a consensus about training needs.

These findings served as the foundation for the development of the 1991 Wingspread Conference, the goal of which was to determine those matters that must be addressed if the family support field is to construct a viable training capacity. During the course of the three-day conference, three fundamental areas were examined.

1 Given the principles and goals of family support, what should be the content of training? What must be taught and learned? Do we have an adequate base of knowledge from which to discern appropriate content?

2 What skills must be learned and what are the most appropriate strategies to transmit such skills? It's important to delineate which skills potential practitioners need to know in order to be effective in the field of family support. It's equally important to determine how those skills should be applied in view of the fact that practitioners work in a variety of settings; practitioners serve different communities, populations, and needs. Effective training should teach practitioners how to think about and apply the principles of family support in any setting.

3 What delivery systems can be created or utilized to provide pre- and in-service training? The first step is to assess what the existing formal and informal delivery systems currently provide and to determine how they might deliver family support training. How can the family support field develop programs that effectively manage the referral process in ways that encourage other delivery systems to turn to us for help? Also, what is the role of credentialing in this process, and how do we develop a standard of quality control for the content of preservice training curricula?

Challenges Facing the Family Support Movement

The family support movement faces a critical challenge as it expands and increasingly engages larger social service delivery systems in a family supportive approach. Issues of program quality must be addressed, and program standards must be established. Toward this goal, representatives of the various disciplines within the family support field should agree on the principles which provide a conceptual framework for programs that rely on partnerships with parents.

Among those who attended the Wingspread Conference there was a remarkable degree of consensus about the field's foundational precepts. The conference attendees adopted as their conceptual framework the following principles stated by the Family Resource Coalition in its Tenth Anniversary *Report* (Vol. 10, No. 1, 1990):

- The basic relationship between program and family is one of equality and respect. The program's first priority is to establish and maintain this relationship as the vehicle through which growth and change can occur.

- Program participants are a vital resource. Programs facilitate parents' ability to serve as resources to each other, to participate in program decisions and governance, and to advocate for themselves in the broader community.

- Programs are community-based and culturally and socially relevant to the families they serve. Programs are often a bridge between families and other services which are outside the scope of the program.

- Parent education, information about human development, and skill-building for parents are essential elements of every program.

- Programs are voluntary; seeking support and information is viewed as a sign of family strength rather than as an indication of deficits and problems.

Conference attendees recognized that the family support field must develop a strategic plan to expand the quality and quantity of training, predicated on the agreed-upon principles of family support. The discussions at the Wingspread Conference generated a four-part approach to meeting this challenge:

1 The elements which constitute a quality family support program must be clearly articulated. Defining what constitutes good training would help define what makes a good program, and vice versa. Therefore, it was agreed to give the highest priority to the development of a concrete statement of Best Practices for working with families. Such a statement would provide a tangible resource for endorsing certain training approaches as being appropriate practices for work with families or with parents.

A Best Practices statement would require a clear expression of the principles which represent consensus among professional family support practitioners, and a translation of those principles into indicators that represent appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. The statement would be more than a list of strategies or a description of methodology; its aim would be to operationalize programmatic principles.

As a model, conference presenters cited the 1987 landmark document developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The document, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*, endorsed practices used by educators and researchers in their work with young children. NAEYC articulated its principles in the form of appropriate practices versus inappropriate practices, and developed a series of evaluations for the desired outcomes for each principle when it was operationalized.

In a similar manner, a Best Practices document in the family support arena would serve as a basis from which to articulate its principles to others who are unfamiliar with the profession, to operationalize these principles, and to evaluate family support programs and practitioners.

2 The profession must develop a set of minimum competencies and desirable staff characteristics for those who work in family support programs.

The qualities that staff members bring to a program are a powerful factor in its success. Because even the best training has its limitations, a recognized set of precepts can provide a framework for hiring by more clearly articulating the values that are compatible with the principles of family support programs.

Since the training process focuses on operationalizing values rather than on inculcating them, it is important to ascertain that potential staff members share those values before they are hired.

Developing and clarifying the roles and interrelationships among paid staff, volunteers, professionals, and paraprofessionals within family resource programs is an integral part of the development of competencies.

3 The training must model the content of family support principles in order to best educate staff. The principles that underlie the family support movement are process-oriented and concern the ways in which people relate with one another. Family support practitioners do not deliver a service or treatment to a passive recipient; rather, they create relationships with parents through which growth and change can occur. Similarly, training programs should not deliver knowledge to passive recipients but transmit content in a manner that engages potential staff members in a process of growth and change, thereby modeling the expectations and behaviors for staff interaction with families. Conceptualizing programs as extended families carries with it the inclusion of natural helping systems. It also underscores the necessity to recognize that those who are serious about seeking and building on family strengths and sharing power find themselves in a position of redefining professional relationships.

Emphasizing the process of training as well as its content has several implications for programs. It promotes a level of sensitivity among staff as they learn to respond to families' needs at both individual and systems levels. It promotes the integration of both formal and informal forms of support.

The dynamic quality of family support programs reinforces the desirability of standardization within the field. Because the process of individual staff development is ongoing, many programs have found that in-service training is far more critical than pre-service training. This raises questions about how to strike a balance between pre-service and in-service training, which in turn raises questions about the implications this might have for a credentialing process.

4 A final challenge is to balance theory with practice in the real world. For example, family support programs often operate on tight budgets with limited staff, and the program's energies are primarily directed toward helping families. Thus, despite the obvious importance of in-service training, little time is available for it. Because of the demands of their jobs, in-service training is only one of many elements that staff members in a family support program must juggle.

Another reality that must be faced is that the social service field operates within an existing set of hierarchies—e.g., directors, supervisors, and line workers. The current structures conflict with the partnership model embraced by family support programs.

An additional reality is that many institutions already offer "family support" training. However, the curricula offered by different colleges, universities, and professional schools vary widely.

Thus, given the existing realities, even if the family support field develops a comprehensive conceptual framework for staff training, we cannot insure that the training will be utilized. Conference attendees agreed that the family resource movement must find ways to operationalize how we work and influence existing professional institutions. And we must encourage them to adapt themselves in ways that will be helpful to those individuals being trained to work in this multidisciplinary arena.

In view of these challenges, how do we operationalize the accepted principles of family support? Although we don't have a Best Practices document to articulate what constitutes acceptable training and program standards, we do know a great deal about the characteristics of programs that create a desirable family support environment. We do know, in principle, what constitutes appropriate training, both in terms of content and process. Finally, we know what current delivery systems provide. Conference participants examined each of these in turn in order to understand the elements that play a crucial role in current family support programs.

Desirable Program Characteristics

As the conference participants grappled with the complex issue of desirable program characteristics, it became clear that an in-depth exploration of this topic was not possible in the time allotted for the conference. In another forum, this issue should be examined in greater depth.

Despite time limitations, Wingspread Conference attendees did agree on a basic series of assumptions about family support programs and their characteristics. The first is that the programs are diverse—in their settings, the populations they serve, the communities in which they are located, and the services they provide. Family support professionals—with diverse academic and professional backgrounds—function in ways that differ significantly from the deficit-based model that characterizes most social-service systems today. Instead, family support programs and those involved with them are united by their commitment to family support principles, one of which is creating productive relationships between the programs and the families they serve.

As initially articulated by Bernice Weissbourd in *Families as Nurturing Systems: Support Across the Life Span* (edited by D. Unger and D. Powell, 1990), a number of characteristics distinguish desirable family support program practices:

- Relationships between parents and professionals are typified by collaboration and shared decision-making.
- Program services are designed in cooperation with parents to meet their expressed needs and enhance individual and family strengths.
- Programs are planned to assure their relevance and sensitivity to the culture and values of the families served.
- Linkages and cooperative relationships are established with community organizations and institutions, so there is an awareness of what services are available.
- Peer support networks are nurtured and facilitated.

Effective family support programs build on family strengths and are characterized by an environment which encourages and empowers parents to advocate on their own behalf. Family support programs should also be characterized by activities and services that promote child development, parental skill-building, and child-care services. Lastly, family support programs should build a knowledge base about the social-service policies and systems that are available to families.

(A comprehensive examination of desirable program characteristics is a central part of the Best Practices Project, which was formally launched in June 1992. An initial report of that project is included in Appendix A of this monograph.)

What Constitutes Good Training?

Conference attendees agreed that, despite their diversity, family support programs appear to have a clear understanding of the characteristics which are desirable in a family support staff. For example, in hiring personnel, they look for individuals who will:

- become competent and confident in using optimal practices related to his/her position within the overall family support framework
- demonstrate the potential and desire to engage in personal growth and critical self-reflection
- exhibit the necessary degree of energy and persistence when working with families
- possess the ability to meaningfully engage the families for whom they are a resource.

Training should focus on helping practitioners develop the knowledge and skills that will enhance their ability to create positive and productive relationships with families.

What makes family support staff training unique

The challenge of training in the family support arena is heightened by the multidisciplinary nature of the field. As was pointed out in a conference plenary session, it is not our aim in training practitioners to create a "Department of Family Support" in colleges and universities. Instead our goal is to combine family support principles with appropriate knowledge from the various disciplines relevant to family support and to transmit that information in a process-oriented manner.

As practitioners, we are not in the business of delivering services and treatments to families; we are in an ongoing, cooperative process of creating programs with parents and families that meet their particular needs. Thus, the manner in which we transmit to new staff the knowledge and skills that allow for the creation of these programs is critical to the success of a program. The manner in which we transmit the knowledge to potential practitioners should powerfully and convincingly model the way in which we hope trainers will interact with families.

This unique perspective may make more traditional training methods—and even the term training—inappropriate for the field. Some experts in the field believe that "shared learning" is a more accurate reflection of the process that takes place in family support programs. And there is consensus, previously articulated in this monograph, that a Best Practices statement will represent a crucial first step in validating the core of knowledge and principles with which practitioners in the family support arena operate.

Effective training is geared toward building competencies that allow practitioners to be explicit about behaviors and practices that are ordinarily intuitive. Ideally, this should involve an overall systems accountability in which both the trainers and those being trained are continuously evaluating individual staff roles, program objectives, and overall work plans. Staff members are viewed as resources whose knowledge can be increased over time. This increased knowledge should lead to continual re-evaluation of and innovations in the training process itself.

Process and content are closely linked in all aspects of family-support training. Training is geared toward creation of an environment that facilitates both individual and systemic well-being, growth, and change. The goal is to achieve simultaneity of both process and content in all aspects of programming and across all levels of staff and participants.

What family support staff training should include

Although many questions remain about the specifics of training, conference participants agreed on the general themes that training must include.

- Training should be viewed in the realm of ongoing support, both for entry-level staff and for veteran members. It is not a one-time-only occurrence, but an ongoing process that allows practitioners to assess themselves and the programs they work for.
- Training should emphasize the unique aspect of the family support approach and how that must be incorporated into an already existing array of skills that any practitioner brings to the job.
- Training should maintain a consistency with underlying family support principles. In this regard, the development of a Best Practices document would provide a benchmark for the

most appropriate and effective ways to work with families using this perspective.

- Training should emphasize the team approach as essential to the process; this allows for including parents in as many aspects of program development as possible. It also permits each family support program to effectively deploy its professional resources across a number of areas.

- Training should emphasize the importance of personal development, particularly in terms of self-awareness and personal experience. It should include ways in which inner resources are continually accessed and made use of among practitioners, thus modeling desirable ways in which these approaches can be utilized with families who participate in the program.

In the course of the wide-ranging discussion about the issues relevant to family support training, two specific areas emerged as vitally important: cultural responsiveness and empowerment. Conference participants addressed both of these training components in some depth.

Cultural Responsiveness as a Training Issue

Understanding and accepting the influence of culture is a necessary prerequisite for working in the family support arena. Over the years, the language we have used to acknowledge the importance of culture has evolved from "awareness" to "sensitivity" to "competence," and, most recently to "responsiveness." Culture is a dynamic process, including behaviors, ideas, attitudes, customs, and language that gives people a generalized design for living. Each culture influences families who are socialized within its structure. Cultural responsiveness entails learning a set of behaviors, attitudes, and practices which allow staff members to work effectively with people of different cultures.

What training elements should be considered to help practitioners achieve cultural responsiveness?

- **Contextual knowledge** helps practitioners become aware and accept the differences among families that are a product of their particular cultures. This includes a willingness to understand how those cultural differences may impact the helping process itself.

- **Self-awareness of one's own cultural values** is important because one's culture influences one's work. Practitioners must be aware of the fact that their own thinking and manner of engaging families can affect their work, especially when those families are of a different culture.

- **Creating a safe environment that encourages self-disclosure** is an important training prerequisite for developing cultural responsiveness. When we are able to acknowledge and celebrate our own diversity as practitioners, we are more likely to seek out the same kinds of information from our families, information that will help us understand what makes a particular population or a particular family unique. It is critical that we allow families to define the traditions, beliefs, and support systems that they value and celebrate.

- **Knowledge about the impact of class and culture on families' values and behaviors** is crucial, as it can help us understand how these affect the ways in which families seek help.

- **Understanding the role of language and communication** is critical. We need to know the key words and terms that families use when talking about themselves. Only then can we discern what they are trying to share with us about their experiences.

It is important to be sensitive to the potential impact of our roles as professionals in our interactions with families. As professionals we have power, and need to remember that a hierarchical rather than an egalitarian approach can have a detrimental effect on our relationships with the families we serve. At the same time, we must recognize that these relationships with families are not absolutely egalitarian. Our knowledge and training give us a degree of authority in our interactions with families. But the manner and style in which we interact is grounded in a set of values that leads us to engage families with a sense of respect for their strengths and abilities.

Empowerment as a Training Issue

Empowerment is an intentional and ongoing process which is centered within

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the local community. Empowerment involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation. Its purpose is to allow people to recognize and utilize their inherent strengths and abilities to accomplish goals they have determined are necessary for their own growth and well-being. Through the process of empowerment, people who lack an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.

Several key beliefs underlie an empowerment perspective: that all people have strengths, that diversity is positively valued, and that the powerless have as much capacity as the powerful to assess their own needs.

In family support programs, empowerment is meant to help parents become aware of their importance. This results in their ability to make changes in how they relate to the systems in which they function. A key principle of empowerment is that those people who have been disadvantaged by the way in which society is structured must play a primary role in developing the strategies by which they can gain increased control over their lives.

Training, therefore, should be geared to help practitioners creatively identify and maximize those strategies which can lead to an environment where empowerment can take place. The interrelationship with cultural responsiveness is critical; practitioners need to understand the history of a given cultural group in order to help that group determine the most appropriate strategies for addressing inequitable power relations.

The skills required for an empowerment orientation aren't new. Careful listening, critical reflection, the use of group process and shared decision-making, leadership development—these are areas in which many practitioners already receive some form of training. What is new is the need to tie these skills to the needs of the families and communities in a way that will generate necessary resources. This requires that practitioners develop a greater understanding of societal structure and power relationships as they operate within both individual and institutional settings.

Current Delivery Systems for Training

As the family support movement begins the task of creating a conceptual framework for future training, it must also attend to existing training systems. Long-term change in human services delivery methods will require many alterations of the current training programs in universities, state governments, and professional and private organizations. Community and program-level training of staff and volunteers will also need to change. Transforming traditional delivery systems into effective mechanisms for providing innovative family support will be a challenge.

With this in mind, the Wingspread group spent time examining some of the prevalent training delivery systems: states and universities. Because we already know a great deal about how training takes place within these systems, this section is somewhat less theoretical than the previous one. In addressing the specifics of particular systems at the conference, the intent was twofold: to better understand these systems in order to facilitate more effective cross-system linkage; and to become more sensitive to the challenges these systems face in responding to families.

Training within State Systems

States are increasingly being asked to respond to the needs of families in ways unfamiliar to them; they are also being invited to review the ways in which they provide training to their employees. Those in the family support field who have worked with states shared their insights with other conference participants.

First, it is important to recognize that each state has its own system. As such, it has a unique culture: a set of values, ideas, behaviors, language, and traditions. States have their own way of doing things, and it is the task of anyone going into a particular system to understand that culture. This reality illustrates the fact that "cultural responsiveness" has as much importance at an institutional or systemic level as it does at an individual level.

Currently, states tend to deliver services in a manner which is rather depersonalized. They stress accurate identification and delivery of services rather than building relationships with families. Even the language used by many state delivery systems tends to depersonalize the people it serves. "AFDC recipients" can be distanced more easily than can a specific family composed of parents and children.

Too often, state systems focus on problems rather than on the inherent strengths in families which might be further encouraged and developed. Ironically, families must often "prove" they are incapable of helping themselves before the state will come to their aid.

Unfortunately, rather than encouraging a sense of empowerment among families, this deficit approach to service delivery promotes a further sense of powerlessness: in order to continue receiving services, families must remain incapable of helping themselves.

Services provided by state systems also tend to be fragmented, which is quite different from the holistic approach adopted by the family support movement. Problems within families are often treated as if they were totally unrelated to each other.

Viewing families through a lens that tends to magnify problems and minimize strengths creates a number of implications for training within state systems:

- Staff tend to be trained exclusively in policies and procedures. Few, if any, internal staff are readily available to provide newer staff members with the "soft" interpersonal skills that are such a crucial part of successfully supporting families.

- Training is rarely contextually integrated in state systems. Too often, it is done within individual departments, rather than across departments. Child-welfare workers and public-aid workers often serve the same families, but neither have been prepared to deal with both issues of child abuse and neglect and those of training and employment. Even when consultants are called in, the training perspective is seldom holistic. Workers may receive training in issues of domestic violence or in issues related to substance abuse, but that training may not provide them with the overall perspective necessary for understanding how the two issues can be intimately related.

- Sometimes, training occurs outside the overall context of the system itself. Such training does not reflect or facilitate a better understanding of the ways in which outcomes for families are connected to the relationship among policies, procedures, training, and practice.

- State systems are multi-layered, and change constantly takes place at every level. Too often, training programs address only one level of the system, without taking into account the simultaneous changes that are occurring within the rest of the system.

Given these realities, how can family support training be effectively integrated into existing training at the state level? How do we operationalize, at a state systems level, some of the principles we use when working with individual families?

1 We should avoid being overly critical. We do not use a deficit model when providing service to families nor should we use that approach when operating within state systems. Like any established systems, states do not need to be reminded about what's "wrong" with their culture. However, they can learn new ways to think about and operationalize that culture. Our task is to help states develop new models for good practice that they can accomplish within the context of their existing culture. At the same time, the ultimate goal is to help states change their cultures so that they can be more responsive to the needs of the families they serve.

2 We need to provide adequate documentation whenever we work at the state level. States are comfortable with paperwork and will pay more attention to information that has been documented in writing. The more questions, agreements, and issues are recorded, the easier it is to make progress within the existing system.

3 We should attempt to give state employees a sense of program ownership. One approach that has proven effective is to create work groups made up of staff from all levels, and to provide them with an opportunity to design the type of training that will eventually be used throughout the state. Those who are already in the state system know best what they need; their involvement is critical to the success of any program.

Universities and Pre-Service Training

Universities play a major role in the pre-service training. Currently, they are the primary agent of certification in the human services professions, in the form of degrees and credentialing. However, pre-service training takes place at a number of levels.

Conference participants agreed that this raised questions about both undergraduate and graduate training in different settings, including community colleges, continuing education programs, and cross-disciplinary programs. This issue highlights the challenge of working with a variety of disciplines to make the principles of family support programs come alive.

The ability to incorporate a family focus into those disciplines which work with families, at both the individual and the systems level, poses a critical challenge to universities. For example, social work students should have the capacity to utilize a family support focus in their work. This would involve not only familiarity with prevention, early intervention, and support services, but also the capability to access a continuum of supports that should be available to all families.

If the principles of family support extended throughout the "social service" curricula of a university, no student would graduate without the ability to work with families in a family-friendly manner—regardless of whether they specialize in law, psychiatry, social work, nursing, public health, early childhood education, or school administration. Universities must be part of the process of building a family support agenda into their curricula across the board.

Currently, universities are generally more adept at communicating content than they are at training and modeling the kinds of processes that characterize family support programs. It is a challenge for them to incorporate the process of training into higher education training programs. Partly, that is due to the fact that engaging in the types of self-reflective processes central to family support can be threatening to the balance of power that exists in a university setting. Moreover, it poses questions about just who the powerful professional is—the professor or the newly tutored student. It will be a challenge to the family support field to redefine the notion of professionalism in a manner that makes is possible to incorporate open-ended, egalitarian processes into their existing structures.

The family support movement must make the universities part of a partnership. Conference attendees expressed the hope that as universities begin to "own" the family support agenda, they would take a more active role in keeping state governments on track in fulfilling their responsibilities to families.

It was generally recognized that universities have not been quick to get on the family support bandwagon. And they generally do not structure their curricula with strong emphasis on service to the community. Thus, it was felt that universities need to be approached with "gentle dissonance." We must employ the same kind of respect and utilize the same egalitarian and empowering principles that we employ when we work with families.

The importance of developing a Best Practices statement for the field emerged again when it came to the issue of pre-service training. Regardless of whether it is geared toward on-the-job training or university training, pre-service should include a non-negotiable core of practices and principles that everyone entering any "people-serving" field would need to understand when working with families.

Conference participants agreed that much more needs to be understood about what a credentialing process might look like for both individual practitioners and family support programs. In addition, there are many questions about how this credentialing would impact pre-service training, state licensing requirements for various professions, and CDA certifications. Once again, a Best Practices statement was viewed as an essential pre-requisite for such a process.

Because the family support field has evolved as a multidisciplinary movement, there was a sense that credentialing must have a multidisciplinary aspect. Credentialing should be approached collaboratively across systems and across academic disciplines. In addition, the credentialing process should be experience based, taking into account the various competencies that have been discussed in this monograph.

Recommendations

The Wingspread Conference was a dynamic process. During the course of its workshops and discussions, the attendees moved through the various stages that are a natural part of building group cohesion. It was a familiar feeling for many of the participants, since the family support programs in which many of them operate encounter change and growth in much the same way. Over several days, as participants pursued a sense of unity and shared purpose, they modeled for one another the very difficulties that many in this discipline experience as they attempt to build programs which represent a unique marriage of process and content.

Having asked as many questions as were answered, the participants found themselves challenged not to feel paralyzed by the questions, concerns, and caveats that had been raised in the course of discussion. Finally, they focused on a number of key recommendations that represent a next step in the evolution of this multidisciplinary approach to working with families.

1 **Begin gathering information for the development of a Best Practices statement for the family support field.** This is essential for developing quality guidelines for program development, evaluation, and training across a wide spectrum of settings.

The Family Resource Coalition would function as the organizational catalyst and put together an interdisciplinary task force. Through an open and inclusive process, the task force would analyze the existing research and experience in the field, recognizing the diversity of settings and populations where family support is being used. The task force would then develop a series of proposals which would be relevant for the various groups functioning in the arena of family support.

How a Best Practices Statement Would Function

The Best Practices statement would lay the groundwork for a comprehensive human development model for training potential practitioners in those skills required to work effectively with families and with other staff members within a family support construct. These skills would be consistent with the already developed principles of family support that currently serve as a foundation for programs in operation throughout the country. A Best Practices statement would also address both the academic and practical aspects of knowledge that are necessary to describe a quality family support program.

A Best Practices statement would operationalize the principles of family support in a number of key areas, including program content, necessary practitioner skills, and strategies for training. It would encompass the academic and practical aspects of knowledge and experience deemed necessary to adequately describe and implement a quality family support program.

A Best Practices statement would incorporate a section on training, whose overall strategic intent would be to enhance the building of relationships through collaborative teamwork, and the creation of an environment that facilitates well-being and growth for families.

The training approach would include:

- experience-based strategies designed to develop personal self-awareness
- a group dynamics orientation
- a multi-cultural perspective
- on-going support.

Practitioners would be required to develop an array of specific skills, including:

- relationship-building skills that emphasize respect, caring, and mutuality
- familiarity with group dynamics
- training in one-on-one interaction with families
- listening skills
- knowledge of the variety of outside resources and services available for referrals.

A program which adheres to Best Practices should also develop and operationalize information sharing within a program. Issues to be addressed in this arena include:

- the ability to assess the ways in which one's personal agenda may have an impact on one's performance

- safe ways in which to reveal both strengths and weaknesses of oneself and others with whom one interacts
- open discussions that address the need to balance power between the professionals and the parents involved in a family support program
- techniques for network-building and eliciting resource information from parents
- opportunities for critical reflection and analysis of oneself and the overall work environment.

Finally, Best Practices within the family support field would aim to facilitate growth among both practitioners and parents. The end result would be to promote ownership of the programs with which they are involved, thus building empowerment among those who up until now have been made powerless by the prevailing social structure.

2 **Translate agreed-upon principles of content, skills, and strategy (as defined by Best Practices) into specific training programs.** The priorities confronting a program which has no money for training, as well as the priorities of a program which has financial carte blanche need to be seriously addressed.

3 **Consider developing a cadre of trainers, all of whom are in agreement about the family support principles which feed into the kinds of training they do.** Using their knowledge of the principles and practices developed in a Best Practices statement, these trainers can most effectively translate the principles into customized training programs for a wide assortment of systems.

4 **The area of cultural responsiveness requires additional work as it relates to integrating a variety of cultural values into a training program.** Because traditional systems tend to be "culture-neutral," they may disregard fundamental influences on families' outlooks and behaviors.

5 **Explore in greater depth the kinds of language being used across the various disciplines that are involved in family support work.** While the Wingspread Conference demonstrated the language currently used for various concepts is not a major hurdle, it was obvious that additional refinement is necessary. As long as we use different words to talk about the same concepts, the field will lack a sense of overall integrity. In addition, clarification of language and terminologies will make us more effective in describing what we are doing in the family support field.

6 **Learn what interfacing with other current delivery systems entails.** This represents an important challenge to the family support field. The more we are able to facilitate and promote our principles within existing systems, the greater the chances of promoting long-term change within those systems. It was agreed that another step should be a thorough examination of current human services delivery methodologies—as practiced in colleges and universities, state governments, professional and private organizations, and community-level training programs for staff and volunteers. The goal would be the transformation of these traditional systems into effective mechanisms that provide innovative family support training environments. As a first step, it was recommended that close communication across disciplines be encouraged—particularly once a Best Practices statement is developed—in order to train new workers to help children and families in ways that complement the principles set forth in the family support field.

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APPENDIX A
Update on Best Practices

As a result of the information and insights provided by the 1991 Wingspread Conference, the Family Resource Coalition, supported by funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, formally launched its Best Practices project in January 1993. This followed a six-month planning process that had been supported by the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation.

There are three main elements of the Project:

- a thorough review of current research, theory, and evaluation in the field;
- wide-ranging consultations with practitioners in family resource programs to document and legitimize their best practices; and
- the development of a constituency of practitioners, trainers, academics, policymakers, funders, and parents to support the application of the standards developed through the project.

The project is being guided by a nationally recognized steering committee, which will meet and confer throughout the process.

The deliverable product will be a book, ideally in notebook form, which will describe how the principles of family support can be operationalized into "best practice."

Several specific domains have been identified which distinguish family support programs from other services for families, including:

- the nature and effectiveness of partnership relationships
- family empowerment as a program goal
- the relationship of a program to its community, community institutions, and existing social services
- responsiveness to emerging needs and the ability to alter program services to meet the needs of family participants
- cultural responsiveness
- the development of advocacy skills at all levels within the service system.

A knowledge base will be developed through four main methods: self-facilitated discussion groups, topical research papers, a comprehensive literature review, and informal input from interested parties. These materials will provide the foundation for drafting the Best Practices statement.

Public hearings will provide opportunities for opinions, concerns and recommendations to be heard prior to the adoption of the final document by the steering committee and the Coalition's board of directors.

The FRC's national conference in May 1994 will provide one forum for these hearings.

As of December 1993, over 300 sets of discussion groups (for staff and participating families) had been convened around the country. In these groups, practitioners were expected to discuss the domains of best practice as they relate to their own experiences in the field. The groups, led by local facilitators, used a guide developed and field-tested by the FRC staff and practitioners in the field.

The unprecedented response from the field is an indication of program leaders' recognition of the significance of this inclusive process in defining program quality.

The literature review is near completion. Documents have been carefully studied and pertinent information has been entered into the National Resource Center's database.

APPENDIX B
Conference Participants

The Wingspread monograph would not have been possible without the participation of family resource and support professionals, trainers and academic authorities. The Family Resource Coalition would like to acknowledge those who lent their time and effort to the formal presentations and panel discussions that were a crucial part of the Wingspread Conference.

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